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SUBJECT: COMESA LEADERS REFLECT ON REGIONAL ISSUES

REF: LUSAKA 426

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Booth for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. During a July 6 meeting with Ambassador Booth, Secretary General Sindiso Ngwenya provided some insights on the recently concluded African Union (AU) and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) summits. He clarified the AU position on the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictment of Sudanese President Bashir, discussed the improbability of COMESA-led military intervention in Madagascar, and reflected on Mugabe's conduct during the COMESA meetings in Victoria Falls. He relayed Zimbabwean President Mugabe's suggestion that he would step down from office in the near future. Ngwenya provided August 31, 2010, as a tentative date for the next COMESA summit in Mbabane. He also conveyed Congolese President Kabila's concerns about DR Congo's capacity to host a Southern African Development Community (SADC) summit in 2009. The Ambassador and Ngwenya also discussed a host of other issues related to bilateral trade and investment as well as areas for U.S.-COMESA engagement (reported septel). End Summary.

African Union Summit

¶2. (C) Ngwenya, who attended the recent AU summit, described the meetings as a success, noting that with so many member countries it is remarkable that the AU leaders managed to agree on anything at all. In his view, the noteworthy outcomes included expanding the AU's mandate to include multilateral trade negotiations as well as regional defense issues. Ngwenya said that numerous African delegates were keen to establish a single AU military force, rather than a United Nations-type arrangement consisting of distinct African troops participating under the AU flag. Ngwenya said the African leaders devoted much discussion to agricultural growth and food security. Regarding the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictment of Bashir, Ngwenya clarified that the AU does not oppose the principal of an ICC trial, but calls for a 12-month moratorium, pending Sudanese peace talks. He said that Botswana had never sought the floor to speak on the AU position vis-a-vis the AU indictment of Bashir and was thus surprised by GOB public statements post-summit.

COMESA Summit

¶3. (C) Despite the COMESA Authority's ardent attention to Madagascar during the June COMESA summit (reftel) and Al-Bashir's defiant remarks during the closing session, Ngwenya argued that economic issues dominated the greater part of the agenda and insisted that COMESA does not intend to expand its role in regional political and security issues. However, he opined that governance systems are still fragile within the region and Africa is about to enter a phase of increased regional instability due to international and intra-national conflicts. According to Ngwenya, COMESA heads of state had opted against a military intervention in Madagascar on the basis that COMESA members are already

addressing security issues in Somalia and on the assumption that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is better poised to address the issue. Ngwenya acknowledged the difficulty of arriving at a joint COMESA position on Madagascar, particularly given Qadhafi's invitation to Rajoelina to make a state visit (an invitation that he said Senegal had also extended).

14. (C) Ngwenya expressed some satisfaction at Mugabe's "relaxed" demeanor during the COMESA summit in Zimbabwe (during which Mugabe took up the COMESA Authority chair). Instead of lashing out at the international community, as he had done at previous summits, Mugabe maintained surprisingly officious and even-tempered conduct throughout the meetings. (At one point, Mugabe described Victoria Falls as the ideal location for launching the customs union because it is a "place for lovers.") Ngwenya attributed Mugabe's good behavior primarily to the Zimbabwean leader's contentment with the government of national unity and the easing up of domestic political pressures. Ngwenya opined that Mugabe, because he no longer feels cornered, is responding more rationally to matters at hand. He also noted that Mugabe had commented during one of the closed door meetings that he intends to step down from office soon in order to leave the political arena open to the "new generation."

SADC Summit

15. (C) Ngwenya said that the next COMESA summit will be held in Mbabane from August 31 - September 1, 2010 at which point King Mswati III will take on the COMESA Authority chairmanship. Although these dates appear to conflict with SADC's annual heads of state meetings ("SADC Ordinary Summit of Heads of State"), Ngwenya said that President Kabila, who was slated to assume the SADC chair in August 2009, conveyed to him that DR Congo is ill prepared to host a SADC summit this year, let alone to begin evaluating the timing for a 2010 SADC event. According to Ngwenya, Kabila recommended that COMESA go ahead with an August summit and SADC subsequently "will work around it." Note: If the COMESA Authority convenes on August 31, technical level meetings, ministerials, and the business forum may commence in Mbabane as early as August 21.

BOOTH